

Proposed wind farm off Vineyard gets congressional boost

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A company that wants to build a floating wind farm off the coast of Martha's Vineyard has received a boost from the state's congressional delegation.

In a letter dated June 26, the entire Massachusetts delegation asked the U.S. Minerals Management Service to review an application by Blue H USA LLC for a lease to test floating platform technology and collect data at the site for the proposed wind farm.

The company announced the congressional support for its application at its U.S. headquarters in Boston yesterday.

"I think the entire delegation recognizes the seriousness of our state and nation's energy crisis," Blue H spokesman Martin Reilly said in a telephone interview. "We're confident with this letter that this moves us one step closer to make this demonstration project a reality."

All 10 of the state's members of the House of Representatives and U.S. Sens. Edward Kennedy and John Kerry signed the letter asking that Minerals Management Service "review and consider the application submitted by Blue H USA, which could prove beneficial for developing future renewable energy resources for Massachusetts and the nation."

In March, Blue H applied for a lease under an interim policy by Minerals Management Service for the development of alternative energy on the Outer Continental Shelf. At the time, the company announced plans to build 120 wind turbines on floating platforms 23 miles south of Martha's Vineyard.

In addition to securing a lease for the project, Blue H must pass an environmental review and receive a series of federal permits before construction can begin. The company hopes to have a demonstration platform in the water by next summer, Reilly said.

Although Blue H did not submit its application in time to be considered during the first round of lease awards in April, Minerals Management Service is reviewing a second batch and expects to announce more leases sometime this summer.

Among the first group of leases awarded were 16 projects in five coastal states that included wind energy, ocean current energy and wave energy projects.

Initially, more than 40 sites were nominated for consideration, according to Minerals Management Service officials. Those not selected for the first lease awards remain in line for consideration, they said.

While the June 26 letter does not express unconditional support for the proposed wind farm, it is an indication that the lawmakers are less concerned about the political implications of the project than some of them have been with regard to a proposal to build a wind farm in Nantucket Sound.

The seven-year-old Cape Wind proposal for the sound scored a positive draft environmental review by Minerals Management Service in January, but it has faced criticism from Kennedy and U.S. Rep. William Delahunt, who represents the Cape and Islands.

Kerry has straddled the fence on Cape Wind over the years, in one instance slamming an effort that would have doomed the wind farm and in other cases siding with Kennedy and Delahunt, who have called for more planning before the project is allowed to proceed.